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ABSTRACT

At our present state of development, courses in historical bibliography provide unusual advantages in relating the past to the present and opportunities for linking the different elements of professional study in schools of librarianship. Even if, in some future age, librarians are concerned solely with electronic journals and online services, they will be impoverished if their professional education ignores history of the book. Seven references are listed. (Author/RAA)

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THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL WORK IN LIBRARY EDUCATION

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The Role of Historical Bibliographical Work in Library Education

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"An essential part of the education background of a librarian"
"A legitimate part of any professional training is the study of its historical and cultural backgrounds..."
"The liberal component of a basically professional curriculum."
"If something doesn't humanise the student in his diet of computers and automated gadgetry, they will all be barbarians. Some already are."

No, it won't do: comments like these[1] on the value of courses on the history of the book will not persuade anyone at present unconvinced of their importance in education for librarianship. The rapid changes taking place in information technology are compelling library educators to think very carefully about the content of their base-level programmes in librarianship: is 'The History of the Book' one of those topics of marginal significance which can be dropped from the curriculum, to allow more time for subjects of pressing demonstrable importance? If devising the curriculum for a new school of librarianship in a developing country, is there any reason to institute courses on 'The History of the Book' as part of its programmes, whether at base-level or at a more advanced stage?

To be sure, in western society it has until very recently been taken for granted that the programmes of training and education for librarians should have a strong historical flavour. Thus in the proposals for 'A summer school of library science' which J.J. Ogle submitted to the conference of the (British) Library Association in 1892, his ideal programme included the manuscript book, 15th century printing types, styles of bookbinding and other historical bibliographical topics in place of the practical aspects of library work which might have been expected. The first summer school to be held in Britain in 1893 reflected Ogle's belief that such topics should be included, so that the schools would 'inspire a respect for the written roll or printed book, which could not but have a wholesome influence on the management of ... libraries'. Likewise, the programme of part-time courses organised by the Library Association from 1898 onwards included the history of printing.[2]

In the United States there was a similar early development, with the inclusion of the history of printing in the 'advanced' courses offered at the Armour Institute, Chicago from 1893. By the time of the Williamson Report in 1923 the history of books and printing was present in the 'common core' of most North American library schools' programmes.[3] Indeed, it has remained the case that most ofthe older and larger schools of librarianship in Britain and North America (and, I believe those on the continent of Europe) include a course or courses on the histroy of the book among their offerings. But today these will probably be offered as elective courses rather than part of the compulsory core programme.

The reason for the continued survival of ' The History of the Book' in library education programmes in western society has of course been due, in part, to the belief of librarians and library educators in the traditional liberal and humanistic values expressed in the quotations at the head of this paper. But they have not been without their critics. Ogle's proposals were in 1892 described[4] as 'more antiquarian in interest than practical' which was probably correct. To many practicing librarians' struggling with inadequate resources in unsuitable premises to build up effective public library service, it seemed wrong for professional education programmes to concern themselves with matters of historical or cultural interest and little demonstrable practical usefulness.

The attacks of public librarians of the 'practical' kind were not limited to denying the worth of historical bibliography in professional education. Attacks were mounted on the whole concept of such studies in themselves. Thus the brilliant (if wayward) Scottish librarian, James Duff Brown, was to proclaim that he believed

> 'English bibliographical work to be little better than a hollow sham, carried out on the narrowest possible lines, by men who are more anxious for personal glory or profit than the accomplishment of any work of public utility....
> Modern bibliography is exactly the same old egotistical hobby which it was a hundred years ago, when it became a fad for rich collectors, and the dry-as-dust devotees of fifteenth century Latinity....Years of devotion expended on the study of book values, rarity, odd physical characteristics, antiquity and uniqueness, have made the bibliographer a mere hanger-on[5] at the heels of the curiosity hunter and book dealer.

Brown may have deliberately overstated his case, which was not well marshalled, and was easily rebutted by bibliographers. Nevertheless, other practicing librarians[6] no less competent and gifted have at times leveled similar charges. There seems to be an underlying lack of understanding, even resentment of historical bibliography among many through to the present day: librarians who are liberal and humane men and women, librarians who may very probably have taken courses on 'The History of the Book' as part of their professional education. Why have the educators failed to convey their beliefs in the value of the subject?

In part, the reasons are to be found in the way the subject has been taught. Some schools have a very creditable record, but in too many the programme will be of survey courses taught by a rather junior member

of faculty who is not a true specialist in the field. They concentrate on the 'great books' and the 'great printers', often using as their textbooks such works as McMurtrie, The Book and Steinberg, Five hundred years of printing -- books excellent in themselves, but somewhat dated, and both examples of popularisation rather than works of primary scholarship. As electives, the courses elicit a favourable response from most of the minority of students who take them, but their practical usefulness for the librarian is often questioned.[7]

As we -- the library educators -- have been doing an indifferent job in teaching in this area, should it be abandoned, and the whole subject of 'The History of the Book' left for others? (Library Schools, after all, frequently draw on the cognate courses offered by other university departments). The answer must be NO for the reasons given below. So far from cutting back in this area, some expansion offers significant educational and practical advantages. Though I shall concentrate on base-level education, the arguments advanced are also valid for higher-level programmes of study. As in other areas of professional education it is at the higher levels that the benefits are most clearly to be seen. The results of bibliographical research for higher degrees are often of considerable value.

In the first place, the subject itself has changed very considerably over the past few years in its academic organisation. On the one hand there are the professional historians who have worked to bring the study of the book into the mainstream of historical work, to relate the history of the book to the society which produced it, and to study the influence of the book on society. Works such as Elizabeth Eisenstein's The Printing Press as Agent of Change,[8] G.A. Cranfield's The Press and Society,[9] Louis James's Fiction for the Working Man 1830-1850[10] and H.J. Martin's Le livre à Paris au xvii[e] siècle : pouvoirs et société[11] are examples of this trend, which is no less noticeable in the serial literature. Historical bibliography is no longer concerned solely with fine printing, 'great books' and the higher culture; it recognises the importance of the ordinary book, and the products of the average printer who served the needs of popular culture. It is not the preserve of the custodian of rare books, and of the enthusiastic amateur: the importance of the history of graphic communication is recognised in many areas of endeavour: literary studies, education, sociology, the history of science, journalism and so on. Valuable work which has a pervasive importance is undertaken by scholars in these various fields. On the other hand, as well as the scholars who have moved into study of the History of the Book, there remain the enthusiastic amateurs. Many of them are amateurs only in the sense that they do not earn their livelihoods as academics; their scholarship may be impeccable. The continued success of old, and the growth of many new bibliographical societies, of the American Printing History Association, of the (British) Printing Historical Society and of other such bodies[12] attests the value of the amateur as well as of the professional in this field. The heightened public consciousness of the importance of the subject is further illustrated by such developments as the establishment in the United States of the Centre for the Book at the Library of Congress, and by the widespread growth of museums (or galleries in museums) concerned with the printing trade and its artefacts. Printing as industrial archaeology is further reflected by the enormous growth of bibliographical presses over the past twenty years.[13]

The growth in institutions, societies and associations which include

historical studies of printing and the book trade is of course reflected and assisted by the journals and other publications of these bodies. Many of these, such as The Library, the Gutenberg Jahrbuch or Studies in Bibliography[14] have long been core journals in the field, but some of the newer ones like the Revue Française d'Histoire du Livre or Printing History[15] have established themselves as of comparable value. There are also the journals produced independently, like the Dutch Quaerendo, the English The Book Collector, or the Anglo-American Publishing History; or the journals serving library history (and which in their contents are now reflecting library historians' recognition of the significance of the book trade) -- in short, historical bibliography is a growth area, as IFLA's own Annual Bibliography of the History of the Book stands witness.

Secondly, some of the contemporary work being undertaken by research libraries in their role as bibliographical agencies is intimately connected with the work of the historian of the book trade. Despite the endeavours of generations of librarians and bibliographers, retrospective national bibliographies are still woefully inadequate, even in those nations with a long and strong bibliographical tradition. It is encouraging that modern technology is being employed on such vast projects as the (British) Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), or the North American Imprints Program (NAIP) and such more modest undertakings as the Australia and New Zealand Early Imprints Project (EIP), and that these bibliographical tools will be created as data bases.

Work of this kind both demands prior historical investigation, and generates such work as a by-product.[16,17] The newsletter of the British Library ESTC team, Factotum, or its sister newsletter in the United States, Facsimile, well illustrate this development. With so much effort being devoted by research libraries to projects of this kind, schools of librarianship will be failing badly in their function if their programmes do not contribute to such professional endeavour.

It may be argued that work of this kind is of relevance only for the older societies of Europe and perhaps for those of the East (whose tradition of printing is of course far older than that of Europe) and that historical studies can safely be omitted from the professional education of those in the emergent nations of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. This is not so. Many of these nations have had printing for centuries -- since the 1530s in Mexico, the 1550s in India, the eighteenth century in the West Indies and so on. The record of printers who spread abroad in the wake (sometimes in the van) of European expansionism is admittedly part of the history of European colonisation -- but it is also part of the history of the now independent nations. I would suggest that (for example) contemporary Jamaican culture is better understood by enquiry into its 18th and 19th century history, which must include the book trade. To take another example, the street market literature for which Onitsha in Nigeria is justly famous, is better understood by comparison with the 18th century chapbooks of Britain, the French 'bibliothèque bleue' or the contemporary literatura de cordel of northeast Brazil.[18] The historical bibliographer is by no means concerned solely with the distant past: the recent work by Tim Couzens and David Rabkin for instance, which has uncovered hitherto 'unknown' creative writing by black South Africans[19] is a case in point.

Of no less importance than the changes in historical bibliography

itself, the changing form of professional education for librarianship in recent years has created a climate in which growth is both practicable and desirable. Library schools have moved from being narrowly vocational into a situation in which their function is more truly educational.

In some schools, degrees in librarianship are offered, in which professional studies form the major element studied along with other more traditional academic disciplines in a programme intended to produce the rounded well-educated professional. The cynic may suggest that at times the other academic disciplines were thought necessary to secure approval by the universities of proposals for degrees in librarianship -- to introduce some academic rigour into a 'soft' subject which was not highly regarded by many scholars in the traditional university disciplines. There may have been an element of that, but in most degree programmes proposed by British library schools for Council on National Academic Awards (C.N.A.A.) accreditation it seems clear that the curriculum in auxiliary subjects (whether in regional studies, literature, social history or another area) has been developed deliberately for its connection with, and enrichment of, the topics of direct vocational study.

Studies of The History of the Book are particularly valuable in such programmes. The traditional connection of Libraries and The Book makes the relevance of such study obvious. The approach, depth and scholarship of work in historical bibliography is well recognised in academic circles. Its kinship to other disciplines in the humanities makes it valuable as an example of the way such scholars gather, create and disseminate knowledge.[20] Exposure to the historical method in research comes naturally with historical bibliography, but in addition modern bibliographical scholarship also uses statistical and other methods: the student is not exposed only to the historical method. The way in which bibliographers are exploiting modern means of information storage and retrieval can also be brought out effectively as a facet of contemporary work. Finally, the fact that this is an area of endeavour in which librarians have contributed and continue to contribute valuably, makes it an appropriate field of study, and will strengthen the student's pride in his profession.

In those societies which have developed librarianship education at postgraduate level, there is not the same need for enrichment of the vocational programme. Nor is there the same opportunity: the relatively short duration of such courses makes it difficult to secure time even for all topics of direct vocational importance. In such programmes, some of the 'core' courses (e.g. the role of the library in society) will need to draw on some areas of historical bibliography. An elective or optional course is also desirable for those students who want to pursue study of this kind, since it will enrich their understanding of many matters of continuing professional concern such as public access to information and copyright. The significance of (for example) printed ephemera, and problems of conservation of materials will be more readily realised than if no such courses are offered.

There is another excellent reason for the inclusion of such courses in the programmes of schools of librarianship. Library schools often draw heavily on other departments in the university for the provision of 'cognate courses': the non-librarianship element in C.N.A.A. programmes in British schools, for example. What do we offer in return? There

are not many courses offered by library schools which are suitable for (or attractive to) students in other fields of study.

Yet historical bibliography is one area which is of pervasive interest: in literary scholarship, historical work and so forth. For the academic staff of Literature and History Departments it is a marginal area, and one for which they find great difficulty in securing staffing.[21] A properly organised programme on The History of the Book in schools of librarianship can attract students from other fields, and secure reciprocal co-operation with other academic departments which is very advantageous. Such co-operation is not limited to the parent institution: the involvement of library school personnel in retrospective bibliographical projects like ESTC and EIP is of considerable value.

That there is no ideal syllabus on The History of the Book suitable for all schools in all countries goes without saying. A programme must be formulated which is directed to the individual history of the particular society and its book trade. This will be within the global context for comparative purposes. Thus teaching the subject in Britain I could safely ignore the work of missionary printers, though in the New Zealand context they must figure largely in my course. Different aspects of the development of copyright and book trade history must be emphasised, to account for the production of 'Colonial Editions' by the British publishers of a century ago.

Though no ideal syllabus can exist, and different emphases are appropriate in different nations, there will be pervasive features. An effective programme will look at the book and its history from several different aspects. (I should perhaps emphasise that I am using 'Book' in its broadest sense to include serial publications, pamphlets and broadsides, posters, patent specifications and so forth as well.)

There is the book as physical artefact: from this point of view the development in materials and techniques of papermaking, typefounding, printing and illustration methods, and bookbinding will be considered.

Study of the book as article of commerce permits exploration of the booktrade and of the firms and organisations concerned with providing the materials which pour into our libraries. Study of this kind, extending to commercial circulating libraries and reading rooms correlates with Library History very well.

Through the book as vehicle for text consideration of the great books which have helped shape modern society is possible; extending this study to the effect of printing techniques and book-trade organisation on the way in which authors present their work (e.g. the effect on English creative writing of the dominant 3-volume form of novel in the 19th century) provides links with the textual bibliography which is the concern of literary scholars.

The book as art form provides a good means of approach through some of the great books of the past to questions of legibility, effective design and fitness for purpose. The main concentration in this part of the course has to be on the great books. But through consideration of such work as the Aldine Poliphilus, the Kelmscott Chaucer, or Grolier bindings or Bewick's illustrations it is easy to move to surveying the effect of the Masters' work on the ordinary trade book, and the success of translating higher art to a popular level.

Such a programme touches on matters of contemporary concern to librarianship at many points. But its relevance is increased if it also includes final work on the ordering and arrangement of bibliographical description. Viewed from these different aspects, it becomes very clear to students that for some purposes the book must be described bibliographically in different ways. The current concern of the Independent Research Libraries Association (I.R.L.A.) to secure modification of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR), or the ESTC modifications to the British Machine-readable Cataloguing (MARC) format, for the better convenience of users of their special categories of material, are instances of the topics appropriate for discussion here. Through such means the particular problems of providing catalogues for special collections, and retrospective cataloguing for national and other libraries of record can be viewed from a different aspect from that of core courses in cataloguing. To cover such matters in a History of the Book course increases its direct vocational value for those students moving to posts concerned with rare books. This is of course an ambitious programme, calling for teachers with enthusiasm for the subject, and demanding hard work from the students.

No textbooks appropriate for a programme of this sort exist. For many nations, the available material on their publishing and book trade is slight and elusive, and the inadequacy or absence of retrospective national bibliographies presents a problem. A problem, but also a challenge: because of the dearth of suitable materials the lecturing staff and their students are forced into original research to provide the materials of local relevance for such courses; materials which can be real contributions to the bibliographical record. Undergraduate degree programmes in librarianship often include a special local topic in the final year. Through some of the 'Caribbean Studies' carried out by Librarianship students at the University of the West Indies, plus material gathered from the Jamaica Archives and other sources to provide 'Caribbean content' for its course on the History of the Book, the Department of Library Studies in Jamaica was able to develop a series of Working Papers on West Indian Printing which are of much more than local interest.

Enterprises of this kind provide opportunities for valuable work, and the educational gain for students, who can see that the course work they prepare is not just a series of necessary but otherwise useless tests, is enormous. There are many other ways in which courses on historical bibliography can be linked to outside projects of scholarly or professional importance. Some years ago students in a British Library school undertook a pilot survey of printing houses in Leicester (England) for the Printing Historical Society; their work was instrumental in securing for local archives and museums some valuable records and equipment which would otherwise have been destroyed. Involvement of student assistance in the ESTC and EIP projects is but an instance of the way in which very useful work on retrospective national or local bibliography can be undertaken through programmes in historical bibliography.

That the nature of librarianship is changing very rapidly is obvious. One of the reasons for the change comes from the equally dramatic changes in forms of publication. Whether (or how quickly) we are moving towards 'the paperless society' is outside the scope of this paper. Certainly printing can no longer claim to be the only 'art conservator of all arts' -- which was in any case a truthful claim only if libraries preserved the

printer's work!

Even if in some future age librarians are concerned solely with electronic journals and on-line services, they will be impoverished if their professional education ignores the history of the book. At our present state of development, courses in historical bibliography provide unusual advantages in relating the past to the present, and opportunities for linking the different elements of professional study in schools of librarianship.

Notes

1 Quoted in Paul A. Winckler : Report to the Education Committee of the American Printing History Association on the Survey of the teaching of courses in the history of books and printing in the Graduate Library Schools in the United States and Canada. (New York : A.P.H.A., 1979) pp.14-15.

2 Gerald Bramley : A history of library education. (London : Clive Bingley, 1969) pp. 20-24.

3 Bramley, op. cit. pp. 81-87.

4 The way in which Bramley (who is a capable contemporary library educator for whose views I have considerable respect) describes the early programmes of professional education in Britain suggests that he regards historical bibliography as being outside the central study of librarianship.

5 The Library, n.s. 4 (1903) pp. 144-162. The story of Brown's attack, and of the bibliographers' rebuttal, is summarised well in Roy Stokes : The function of bibliography (London : Deutsch, 1969) Ch. 2 pp. 25-69.

6 e.g. L. Stanley Jast : 'Bibliography and the deluge : I accuse' Library Association Record 38 (1936) pp. 353-60.

7 These details, gleaned from the Winckler survey (see note 1) relate to North American schools. My personal experience suggests that the pattern is similar in Britain.

8 Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1979.

9 London : Longmans, 1978.

10 London : Oxford University Press, 1963.

11 Geneva : Droz, 1969.

12 Which may of course be informal groups set up for a specific project, like the 'Book Trade in the North' Study Groups based at Newcastle-upon-Tyne (England).

13 Philip Gaskell : 'The Bibliographical Press Movement', Journal of the Printing Historical Society, 1 (1965), 1-13.

14 Published by the (London) Bibliographical Society, the Gutenberg-Gesellschaft and the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia respectively.

15 Issued by the Société des Bibliophiles de Guyenne (as a successor to their Bulletin) and by the American Printing History Association.

16 Julian Roberts : 'Towards a Short-Title Catalogue of English Eighteenth century books', Journal of Librarianship 2 (October 1970) pp. 246-262.

17 Julian Roberts : 'A giant's step towards a Short-Title Catalogue of English eighteenth century books', Journal of Librarianship 11 (July 1979) pp. 232-237.

18 cf. Leslie Shepard : The history of street literature (Newton Abbot : David and Charles, 1973) and E.N. Obiechina : Onitsha Market literature (London : Heinemann, 1972).

19 For references to this work see the Commonwealth Institute Working Party on Library Holdings of Commonwealth Literature : Commonwealth Literature Periodicals, a bibliography (London : Mansell, 1979) pp. xii-xiii.

20 Librarianship itself belongs with the social sciences, of course. I take it for granted that programmes of librarianship education will concern themselves with the nature of scholarship and writing in the various areas of human endeavour : the Literature as well as the Librarianship of different subject fields. Historical bibliography plus vocational Librarianship studies give students first-hand experience in two broad areas of study.

21 Wallace Kirsop : 'Some reflections on the future of bibliographical research and teaching in Australia and New Zealand', Bulletin, Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 2 (March 1971) pp. 30-35.